DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 161 TE 001 097

By-Fillion, Bryant

Designs in Departmental Organization: Problems and Alternatives.

Pub Date 68

Note-23p.; In "The Growing Edges of Secondary English: Essays by the Experienced Teacher Fellows at the University of Illinois 1966-67," ed. Charles Suhor and others (Champaign: NCTE, 1968), pp166-87

Available from-National Council of Teachers of English, 508 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Ill. 61820 (Stock No. 02455, $2.95)

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.

Descriptors-*Administrative Organization, Administrative Personnel, Curriculum Development, Departmental Teaching Plans, *Department Directors (School), *English Departments, *English Instruction, English Programs, *High School Organization, Institutional Environment, Organizational Climate, Power Structure, School Administration

Evidence indicates that the quality of a high school English department directly depends upon the effectiveness of the departmental organization. Despite the dangers of fragmenting and departmentalizing knowledge, some organization must be established for departmental work to be carried out. Among the variables which influence the organization and functioning of the English department are the school administration; the size, age, and stability of the department; and the nature of the school district. To evaluate the effectiveness of a department's organization, such factors as the department chairman, the authority structure, the written curriculum guide, the physical arrangements, and the climate of the department must be taken into account. The relation of the departmental organization to curriculum development and to the problems of staffing and supervising teachers are additional factors. The best organizational arrangement for any high school English department is that which most effectively and expediently does for the school and its students what the master teacher does for his classes. (LH)

ED028161

The Growing Edges of Secondary English

Essays by the Experienced Teacher Fellows at the University of Illinois 1966-1967

Editors:
Charles Suhor
John Sawyer Mayher
Frank J. D'Angelo

TE 001 087

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
508 South Sixth Street **Champaign, Illinois 61820**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

DESIGNS IN DEPARTMENTAL ORGANIZATION: PROBLEMS AND ALTERNATIVES

by BRYANT FILLION

Mr. Fillion received his B.A. in English from the University of Michigan and his M.S. in education from C. W. Post College of Long Island University; he taught briefly in Birmingham, Michigan, and for four years in the South Huntington, New York, junior high schools. Mr. Fillion participated in the 1966 University of Michigan NDEA summer institute and is currently working on his Ph.D. in English education at Florida State University. In this paper he discusses the need for English department organization and the functions of the department, and he evaluates various organizational patterns.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEPARTMENTS [1]

Two English teachers in the same school are a department, if they are on speaking terms, and one of them may be an English department chairman. Their unity can provide, if not strength, at least the opportunity to oppose a sea of common troubles. But the two-teacher English department is rapidly becoming an anachronism; school and department growth seem inevitable in a period of population explosion, and this fact has important consequences for the structure of English in the secondary schools. It is in the English department that innovations and trends such as those discussed in this book will be considered and realized.

Department growth is not always accompanied by development, however. If we are to benefit fully from the possibilities of increased size and avoid its problems, we would be wise to consider just what those possibilities and problems are and how best to deal with them. Whatever the size, stability, or age of our English department, we should have some concept of how our department can and does influence our teaching. All English teachers, from department chairman to beginner, have a stake in the organization of their department.

Project English, increased public concern and support, and renewed efforts by English teachers themselves have made vast improvements possible in the teaching of English. But implementation and supervision of new programs place severe demands on the English teaching resources of many schools, and department organizations which proved satisfactory

[1] Clarence Hach, Chairman of the English department at Evanston (Illinois) Township High School, graciously consented to read an earlier draft of this paper and made very helpful suggestions.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY NCTE and author
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

for a laissez faire or static curriculum are inadequate to cope with the dynamics of change.

There are several important reasons why organization is especially crucial to the English department. The nature of our subject matter and the way it is taught, the marginal preparation of many English teachers, the relative instability of English departments, and the scarcity of qualified supervisory personnel in English all create difficulties which effective organization may reduce.

The breadth and flexibility of English as a subject create a need for departmental organization, if the subject is to be covered adequately and if unnecessary repetition is to be avoided. As with other subjects, continued innovations and changes in our subject matter necessitate continuous revision of the English curriculum, and revision requires considerable cooperation within a department, especially if the curriculum is to be cumulative and sequential and to reflect a sound rationale.

We are justly disturbed that many students find English dull or uninteresting. Too often they see English as plodding repetition and senseless fragmentation, apparently isolated from "things that really matter." These characteristics are frequently the result of poorly coordinated programs and a lack of the teacher supervision and encouragement which a department should provide. A fragmented or antiquated course of study, out of touch both with English scholarship and with students, can scarcely be expected to generate an interesting or beneficial program. Even a master teacher—unable to assess his course in relation to a total program, unable to depend upon the background his students have had, and provided with inadequate materials and ill-chosen texts—is frustrated in his attempt to make English meaningful and helpful for his students.

The well-publicized shortcomings in English teacher preparation also necessitate strong departmental organization to encourage continuous professional growth and inservice education. If better prepared teachers are to help those less well prepared, interaction is essential. Further, the practice of assigning English classes to non-English teachers demands a departmental organization which can lend assistance to these teachers. The new English teacher with a literature major, too, will need assistance if he is to teach language and composition competently. Also, inadequately prepared teachers are more dependent on available texts and materials than are well-prepared or experienced teachers, and selection of texts is likely to proceed more efficiently and with better results in a well-organized department.

The relative instability of English departments is another reason why organization becomes so important. Department organization may mini-

mize the adverse effects of high rates of turnover typical of English departments. And, as it affects hiring, scheduling, supervision, and teaching conditions, the department may reduce the rate of turnover to some extent.

The scarcity of qualified supervisory personnel in English means that supervision in most departments must be provided from within. Those tasks which an English specialist supervisor might be expected to handle—helping teachers, evaluating the work of the department, keeping up with current trends and practices—must in most schools be done by members of the department if they are to be done at all.

The benefits of effective departmental organization were well documented by the Squire-Applebee study of outstanding English programs:

> That the organization of the department is a necessary ingredient to a successful English program is attested to by the many comments by project observers who cited "Leadership in the Department" forty-nine times, making this one element third in frequency of comments with respect to "Strengths of English Departments." . . . Observers identified "Inadequate Department Leadership" as the most frequent weakness of programs. . . . There is very clear indication from the observers of this project that schools having considerable degrees of organization have superior English programs.[2]

Departmental organization seems to stimulate professionalism and the interaction of teachers, making them more interested and involved in their roles as English teachers.

Nevertheless, there are several alternatives to organization by departments which have been and are being considered in some schools today. Many educators have actively opposed departmentalization on the grounds that it encourages fragmentation of the curriculum and artificial boundaries between subjects. We should examine some of these arguments and alternative organizational arrangements before considering the organization of departments themselves.

FRAGMENTATION AND DEPARTMENTALIZATION

High school departments which jealously compete for the attentions and career aspirations of the brightest students or neglect the average and slower students raise serious questions about the effects of depart-

[2] James R. Squire and Roger K. Applebee, *A Study of English Programs in Selected High Schools Which Consistently Educate Outstanding Students in English*, USOE Cooperative Research Project No. 1994 (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois, 1966), p. 251. Published as *High School English Instruction Today: The National Study of High School English Programs* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968). Citations to this work will refer to page numbers in the original project report.

mentalization. The gulf which has opened between teachers of the humanities and teachers of the sciences grows wider and deeper as specialization increases; critics charge that subject departments engender and increase such fragmentation and division unnecessarily.

Such criticism is not completely unfounded. Expanding knowledge and increasing complexity in all fields have necessitated specialization. The points at issue are the level at which specialization should begin and the degree to which "specialization" is merely fragmentation. The history of departmental organization reveals that to some extent high school departments took shape in emulation of college departments, and some administrators and English education specialists question whether continued emulation is desirable. College English departments increasingly have become departments of English literature; one result of this specialization has been the increasing difficulty of finding teachers with more than a passing knowledge of or background in grammar, linguistics, or composition.

The scope and responsibility of most high school English programs are far broader than those of college English programs, and many educators feel that English department organization tends to obscure this fact. The subject matter of high school English is drawn from a vast array of "specialties," which, on the college level, have often become full departments of which English and American literature make only one. It may be true that emulation of college English departments has tended to make high school departments ingrown and narrow, concerned with literature to the exclusion of other areas of our subject and of related subjects.

The plea for a synoptic view of the various branches of learning has been put most eloquently by A. R. MacKinnon in his lecture "Insistent Tasks in Language Learning." MacKinnon points to the "mounting evidence that the lack of a connected, over-all view of language learning may be taking a frightening toll in persons' mental lives." He notes the lack of articulation between elementary school, secondary school, and college and the widening gulf between literary intellectuals and scientists. He cites our "failure to give . . . students any adequate realization that science and poetry are both equally born of the imagination . . . the expression of human imaginative power—that power from which language springs." [3]

Whether a department functions as a fragmenting or unifying agency depends largely upon its view of itself and of its functions. Certainly

[3] A. R. MacKinnon, *Learning in Language and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 4, 7.

the approach of the departmentalized faculty is not nearly so fragmented as is that of a disorganized group of independent teachers, each proceeding in his own way as best he can. If each subject department accepts the function of implementing the educational objectives of the school as a whole, through a committee of chairmen and interdepartmental curriculum committees, the possibility of a synoptic curriculum seems enhanced rather than endangered. The individual department's focus is primarily inclusive, working to improve teaching, not exclusive, working to dissociate itself from other areas.

The two most common alternatives to departmental organization are the division organization, combining English with other humanities subjects, and the core organization, combining English and social studies. A third possibility, in which no structure intervenes between individual teachers and the administration, is not a practical alternative in larger schools. The humanities division in large schools usually proves unwieldy, and, unless subchairmen are appointed along departmental lines, the effect is to deprive all departments of adequate supervision. One study, typical of several reported in recent years, compared division and departmental organization in several midwestern schools. It revealed that, although both organizations have problems, the department system proved superior in permitting each person to have only one superior to whom he is responsible; facilitating communication; allowing members of the staff to function as coordinated parts of the whole; providing for greater accountability for the proper discharge of responsibilities; utilizing more fully the talents and abilities of each staff member; providing more fully for all essential programs, services, and activities; and utilizing supervisors, coordinators, and specialists as helpers and counselors. The one area in which division organization proved superior was in providing for continuous and cooperative evaluation and redirection of the organization itself.[4] Although the division's one area of superiority is important, I think we must question seriously the acceptability of any organizational arrangement which proves inferior in matters of staff utilization and supervision.

One thing seems obvious: if the work of the department is to be done, English instruction supervised, and programs evaluated, some organization will be necessary. The chances of hiring good teachers, keeping them, and helping them to improve are all enhanced by effective organization, as is the task of constructing and maintaining an effective and

[4] Donald Thomas, "Which Organization—Department or Division—for Your School?" *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals,* XLIX (October 1965), 49–57.

meaningful curriculum. The mere absence of effective departmental structure will not promote anything--synoptic or otherwise. The organization which is too far removed from the individual teacher and his problems will be ineffective. Although they have many points in common which could and should be exploited, discrete subjects present unique problems to their students and their teachers. Attention to these problems is provided most effectively by the cooperation of teachers most familiar with them.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS

What is an English department? For our purposes we will define the department in terms of its members; that is, *the English department is the group of teachers in a secondary school assigned to teach the skills and content normally designated as English or language arts: those courses taught during the regular hours of the school day for which English credit is given toward graduation.* By this definition, all secondary schools have English departments, although they may not be recognized in the school's formal organizational structure. In small schools, or in large schools lacking effective departmental organization, English teachers may just be autonomous members of the total school faculty.

The department is operational whenever the teachers act together, formally or informally, to influence the teaching of English within the school. In some schools this may occur only when the principal calls the teachers into conference to consider course offerings or book selection. In others it may occur during department meetings, in committees, or, perhaps most importantly, when teachers are having coffee and discussing ways to present particular lessons.

A primary condition for the effectiveness of any English department is that the teachers of English within a school must view themselves as part of a department, whether or not they are formally recognized as a department. Even if they operate as part of an encompassing division, such as humanities, their shared concerns with problems of composition, literature, and language create a professional bond which should be recognized and strengthened.

Every English department has a potentially effective structure, and I shall refer to the center of that structure as its *core: those teachers who are well prepared, competent, informed, and professionally committed to teaching, and who possess qualities of leadership.* Ideally, this core will coincide with the *authority structure,* which consists of those teachers who have the most influence within the department. Even in depart-

ments which operate informally or on democratic principles, some authority structure will exist; some pecking order seems inevitable in any group. In large settled schools, this structure may be visible and obvious and may even be formalized by titles: department head, grade level coordinators, assistant chairmen, team leaders. In small schools, an informal authority structure may consist of those teachers with more seniority or greater friendship with the principal. Whether the department is large or small, both the authority structure and the core will have some effect on its operation. If these teachers fail to recognize or exercise their influence, the department may drift without effective leadership or direction, and concerted action may be difficult. In departments where the core and authority structure do not coincide or are in opposition to each other, enervating departmental splits may occur.

This article is not intended to be an application of Machiavellian principles to department politics, but the existence of both a core of competence and an authority structure is important to the functioning of any department. The core is a potential locus of dynamic and effective leadership within a department, and, if the department is to be effective, the core and authority structure must coincide. That is, the authority structure of the department must be based on criteria relevant to the teaching and supervision of English. If the authority in the department, supported by the administration, is granted solely on the basis of seniority or friendship rather than on competence and leadership, the effectiveness of the entire department may suffer. Knowledgeable teachers with leadership ability should be encouraged to use their knowledge to influence the department, and they should be in positions of authority.

One of the most obvious indications of a department's use of its core of competence is the manner in which the chairman is chosen. If competence, preparation, leadership ability, and professional commitment are the primary considerations in selecting a department head, the department organization will have a solid foundation. If the position is filled by confidential and ill-considered fiat from the administration or on the basis of irrelevant criteria, the department organization may be much less effective.

VARIABLES AFFECTING DEPARTMENTS

The most significant variables which influence the functioning of the English department are the school administration, the size, age, and stability of the department, and the nature of the school district; that is,

whether there is more than one high school or junior high, and whether the central administration of the district includes an English specialist and coordinator. This last variable is of increasing importance as the number of multiple-school districts and English supervisors grows.

The School Administration

The principal of the school is responsible for educational leadership within his building. His background, personality, attitudes, and ability will determine to a large extent the efficiency and organization of the English department. Unless he is himself an English specialist—and most principals are not—his ability to supervise English teachers and improve English instruction will be somewhat limited. In large schools the principal must delegate some authority for supervision and program improvement if these functions are to be given any attention at all within the school. Still, some principals actively discourage departmentalization in an attempt to reduce curriculum fragmentation. Others, simply by default, fail to encourage efficient and effective departments. The principal may just be too busy to attend to the department, assuming that it is doing its job if it creates no problems; conversely, he may feel that there is no competent leadership in the English department and may simply reduce those in authority to figureheads. Most commonly, however, the principal fails to grant the necessary authority, support, and time to the chairman responsible for department organization. Certainly there is no dearth of articles by department heads in administrative periodicals bemoaning their lack of time and support. Typical are such titles from *The Clearing House* and the NASSP *Bulletin* as "Head of Department: Just Try to Find Time for It!" "Department Chairman: Why He Often Quits with Pleasure," and "Are English Chairmen Imaginary?"

The principal who is aware of the benefits of a dynamic and active English department can provide the leadership and support necessary for effective departmental organization. He may accomplish this by the careful selection of a competent and qualified chairman who is given the authority, support, time, and pay to do the job well. He may take an active interest in the English department's activities by attending meetings, conferring with teachers, requesting periodic reports on the department's activities, and encouraging attempts to improve the English program. Most important, the principal, in establishing the tone of the school, determines to a large extent whether the school will encourage effective teaching of academic subjects or not. Observers in the Squire-

Applebee study were impressed time and again with the effect of the school principal on the English program:

> In the majority of instances, the building principals were cited for their vision, their concern with academic learning, their ability to work cooperatively with teachers and provide genuine instructional leadership. In such cases, then, the decisions on instruction are made at the school level and have a decided influence on the program. Indeed, where authority is removed from the principal and assigned to the central office, as in most multiple high school districts, observers were quick to note the stultifying effect of such practice on the overall tone of the school.[5]

It seems, then, that teachers interested in becoming part of English departments and schools which will encourage their greatest growth and support should consider carefully the principal of the school and the degree of autonomy granted to the school in which they will teach. Teachers within a school might well consider ways to encourage administrative recognition of the importance of departments and support for effective department organization.

Stability of the Department

Most discussions of department organization focus either on the desirability of having departments or on the responsibilities and problems of department chairmen. In either case, departments are usually spoken of as organizational entities. When we view departments as groups of teachers, however, we see that stability is a feature which must be considered. The teachers who constitute the department today may not constitute the department next year. This is perhaps more true of English than of some other departments. English tends to be the largest department in the school; there are more women than men teaching English; and expanding market, increasing flexibility in hiring experienced teachers, and increasing ease in obtaining money for advanced studies are making individual mobility more possible and attractive.

An English department may have a stable or highly fluid composition. In some schools teacher turnover may totally change the department every two to five years. In settled communities the department may remain relatively stable for years, though this situation is becoming increasingly rare. Even our most prestigious schools seem to be facing high percentages of annual turnover. In changing departments the problem of developing continuity and stability in the course of study becomes particularly difficult. An unsatisfactory stability may be imposed upon unsettled departments through selection and enforced use

[5] Squire and Applebee, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

of textbook series or through a rigid adherence to a fixed curriculum. In stable departments, change may be too slow in coming.

Either situation poses the problem of how much influence new department members should have. On one hand, new teachers often provide the fresh approaches, creativity, and new ideas essential to a dynamic and effective department. On the other hand, new teachers come and go, often with only a passing interest in the continuing concerns of the department and school, and those who remain must live with the decisions or pick up the pieces.

Size of the Department

As departments increase in size, some form of organization is almost certain to develop, if only because the administrative paper work must be done. Also, as schools and departments grow, the principal's ability to direct the academic activities of any one department diminishes and the need for a chain of command increases. However, the organization which develops may be completely haphazard and ineffective. Figurehead positions may be created in order to cope with paper work, leaving problems of instruction and supervision unsolved. Authority and the formal support of the administration may be thrust upon the department members who are not the real core of the department. Worse yet, and perhaps more commonly, full responsibility may be delegated but no provision made for the released time necessary to do the job well. In any case, a department may grow without taking shape, and the problem of organizing a large department grown used to its laissez faire situation may be much more difficult than organizing a small department which is beginning to grow.

Age of the Department

The age of the department will probably affect both its size and its stability. Obviously a new school in a relatively new district will not achieve the stability of a school with a long history, nor will the departments within that school be likely to achieve stability of personnel or program for a period of years. By age of the department I mean the length of time the department has functioned as such. Of course, the personnel of the department may have changed several times in this period, but the influence of a given group of teachers in a department often extends beyond the time they actually teach in the school. The department may still be using textbooks, curriculum guides, and general policies established years before the most senior teacher arrived. To

some extent, the history of the department will affect its practices at present. The chairman and teachers must determine whether this history contributes to the department's development and growth, is totally ineffective, or constitutes the dead hand of the past throttling the efforts of the present. The titled positions available in the department may be quite irrelevant to the problems the department faces today, or the pyramiding of honorary titles through the years may have hidden their ineffectiveness.

FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT

Above all, the department functions to improve the teaching of English within the school. The major difference between the department and the individual teacher is not one of function but of duration and scope. The department's concern extends past the service of any given member through the life of the school. Whereas the teacher acts in relation to the students in his classes, the department acts in relation to the entire student body.

The five functions of the English department are (1) to decide what to teach, when, and to whom; (2) to improve and capitalize on its material and personnel resources; (3) to implement the educational objectives of the school as a whole; (4) to give continuity to the English program; and (5) to promote the continuous revision and updating of the program. Each of these functions contains a number of more specific jobs to be done.

1. *Deciding what to teach, when, and to whom* involves formulating and implementing the objectives of the teaching of English in the school and developing and evaluating the English curriculum or the English portion of a core or humanities curriculum. The department provides guidelines for the content and objectives of individual courses and considers the sequence from course to course. It determines the nature and scope of cocurricular and extracurricular activities which it sponsors. It considers the implications of homogeneous grouping for the study of English and the adaptation of courses to achieve individualized instruction where feasible and desirable.

2. *Improving and capitalizing on the department's resources* is a function which ranges from the obvious matter of selecting instructional materials and helping new teachers to the intangible matters of creating a favorable climate and keeping the department dynamic. The department provides support and encouragement for its teachers, promotes their professional growth and interest, and helps them to improve their teaching. The department may determine teachers' schedules, encourage

and promote inservice education, participate in the evaluation of the English teachers, work to improve the English classrooms and the library, and encourage the use of audiovisual aids and programed materials.

3. Implementing the educational objectives of the school as a whole involves the articulation of the English program with programs of higher and lower schools, evaluating the English program in light of the school's objectives, and coordinating English with the other departmental programs. This function is especially important and may prove particularly difficult in multiple-school districts and in big cities. In such situations, where curriculum decisions are made "downtown" or "in the central office," objectives may have to be *interpreted* in light of the particular school's situation before they can be *implemented.*

4 and 5. Promoting continuity and the continuous revision of the English program are functions which keep the program responsive to the needs of the school's students, to advances in the subject matter, and to educational innovation generally. If the first three functions are carried out, the last two will be performed almost automatically. Teachers who keep abreast of developments in the field and who communicate professionally with other English teachers, and departments that work on curriculum geared to the demands of the subject and the needs of students, will achieve continuity and revision; the program will remain flexible. But the special situation of many departments, where flexibility amounts to chaos or stability to stagnation, requires that these two functions be recognized and specified.

The degree of formal organization necessary to achieve the objectives set forth in these functions will depend upon the situation of the particular department. The structure which will best stimulate and direct dynamic forces must be determined by the chairman and teachers concerned. The remainder of this essay is devoted to an examination of organizational patterns as they relate to the functions of the department.

ORGANIZING THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

The key question to ask in organizing a department is, given our present situation and our present teachers, what is the most effective and efficient way to do our work? The answers to this question are at least as varied as the number of English departments. It is my intention to examine some of the more popular patterns of departmental organization as these patterns relate to the functioning of the department. These structures range on a scale from highly formalized to extremely informal and include the relationships between members of the depart-

ment, the physical arrangements, and the administrative and personnel structure.

Evaluation of the Department

Rare indeed is the teacher or the department completely satisfied with the job being done. In fact, if we may rely on such experienced observers and evaluators as those who conducted the Squire-Applebee study, a primary indicator of a department's effectiveness is its constant striving to improve. Before considering various patterns of organization, then, we have the initial task of determining where we are now—of asking what our present situation is, whether it results in effective teaching of English, and whether it is the best arrangement possible for our curriculum, students, teachers, and school.

The starting point for such an evaluation should be a look at the English program itself, using a device such as NCTE's check list for evaluating junior and senior high school English programs.[6] Or we might view the program in light of the most recent department curriculum guides; is the department doing what it says it is? An inability to determine what the program is or whether the program is in fact being taught is itself an indication of organizational weakness. Evaluation of the program will not tell the whole story, however. It will not reveal specifically why the program is weak, if it is; and it will not indicate those organizational features which may help to remedy the situation.

The English department chairman is the key to departmental organization, especially in large departments. The most important questions to ask about the chairmanship and the teacher holding the position are: How was he selected? Were the criteria relevant? Is he given the administrative support and time necessary to provide supervision and leadership? Does he, in fact, supervise and lead? This last question may not be answered easily; often the chairman's influence is informal and not readily observable except in its results.[7]

If responsibility for the English program resides in the department, then the chairman must have the ability, authority, and time necessary to supervise and evaluate the program. The responsibility for maintaining some sort of "quality control" for the program is inherent in the

[6] Dwight L. Burton, chairman, "A Check List for Evaluating the English Program in the Junior and Senior High School," *English Journal,* LI (April 1962), 273–282. Reprinted as a leaflet (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1962).

[7] Two excellent sources of information about the role of the department chairman are Sue M. Brett, ed., *Supervision of English Grades K–12* (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1965), and Robert J. Lacampagne, ed., *High School Departments of English: Their Organization, Administration, and Supervision* (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1965).

chairmanship if the department is to function effectively. No outsider is in a position to lead or supervise as effectively as the teacher-chairman who, in addition to being a specialist in the subject, is in daily contact with students, teachers, and the program. The coordinator or English specialist "downtown" or "in the central office" serves an important function in support of the entire program and the department, but meaningful supervision and effective leadership must also be exerted by a teacher who is thoroughly familiar with the school and the department, as the Squire-Applebee study makes clear:

> The significance of the department chairman was underscored again and again throughout the Study. District supervisors and even building principals, insofar as classroom supervision is concerned, have little direct impact on teaching practice. Where a chairman has time and responsibility to supervise classroom teaching, a strengthening of the entire program is manifest.[8]

The authority structure, in addition to the chairman and whether formal or informal, provides another index to its organization. Do those in positions of authority act to provide leadership and direction for the department without becoming dictatorial? Are titled positions in the department merely honorary positions? Do teachers know where to turn for help with a teaching problem? Do teachers feel free to express problems and opinions openly and to use the sources of help available? Does the authority structure of the department have the support and professional respect of teachers within the department and the administration of the school?

The written curriculum guide, if there is one, also provides an indication of the department's organizational effectiveness. Is the guide constantly evaluated and revised? If not, when was the most recent guide revised? (There is something indicative in a chairman's embarrassed search through dusty shelves for a copy of the department's curriculum guide, or a teacher's puzzled look when asked about "the English program.") Is the guide actually used? If not, on what basis do teachers construct their courses? Do textbooks alone determine what shall be taught, and when, and to whom? Does the curriculum provide a suitable floor for all teachers, without imposing a ceiling on innovation and creativity?

The physical arrangements for the department provide a highly visible, if somewhat less reliable, index of its organization. Does the department have an office and work space, or has it attempted to secure them?

[8] Squire and Applebee, *op. cit.,* p. 499.

Is a professional library readily accessible, and is it used? Are English classrooms identifiable as English classrooms? [9]

Physical arrangements are a feature of organization which is often overlooked but which may contribute significantly to the effective use of teachers and of material resources. Besides the contribution to interaction among members and the sharing of ideas, a department center with work space and an area for relaxation has a direct influence on classroom teaching, since materials and books to supplement lessons are more likely to be used when they are readily available.

Perhaps the greatest single advantage of a department center is this centralizing of equipment and materials useful to English teachers. Materials and machines which are inconvenient to obtain, hidden away in dark closets and listed cryptically in voluminous manuals of an instructional materials center, are too often unused, and classes may suffer as a result. Conspicuous availability can make the difference between frequent use of materials and almost total abstention.

Of course, physical arrangements for a department will depend on the size, finances, and design of particular school buildings. But even in small schools, the faculty lounge or a section of the library can often be outfitted for various departments in the school, with instructional materials, departmental libraries, ditto machines, and comfortable work space.

The climate of the department is perhaps the most important indication of its organizational health, but it is difficult to measure. This climate is evident in the general dynamics of the department, in the teacher's enthusiasm toward his colleagues and his teaching, in his conversations in the department office or faculty lounge. It is evident in the professionalism of department members—whether they are enthusiastic teachers or are just doing their jobs; whether they are active in professional organizations, keep up with the journals, attend workshops and conferences, and take courses in colleges and inservice programs. Climate is evident in the nature of the department meetings and in the interest they generate. Most important, the climate of the department is generally reflected in the curriculum and in the attitude of the students toward English.

The ideal organization in any department will be dynamic, encouraging attempts to improve, supporting achievements, and thwarting complacency. The laws of gravity, friction, wear, and change effectively preclude the perpetual motion machine and the homeostatic English

[9] A complete list of materials and equipment recommended for English classrooms and departmental offices is included in Appendices A and B of *High School Departments of English, op. cit.,* pp. 138–156.

department, but, unlike the machine, an English department may almost cease to function years before anyone notices.

Professional evaluations of a school's English program and department by well-trained observers from accrediting associations, universities, or state departments of education may prove extremely helpful. Reports and suggestions based on such evaluations may provide the impetus necessary for effective assessment and change, and their possible effect in securing support from the administration and board of education should not be overlooked. Nevertheless, in the long run the most important evaluation for any department is its continuing self-evaluation.

Organization and the Curriculum

Department organization has a direct relationship to English curriculum development and educational change. If the course of study is to be based on a coherent philosophy supported by the teachers, and if the department is to be responsive to the changing demands of students, subject, and school, communication and a means of reaching consensus will be necessary. As a recent study conducted at the University of Michigan indicates, relationships among teachers are of primary importance in any attempt to initiate change. The report of the study cautions against organization which "blocks the sharing and dissemination of new ideas," encourages the adoption of "new administrative styles which decentralize decision making," and concludes:

> The growing body of research findings about change processes in the schools makes clear . . . that the development of an open and supportive climate of personal and professional relationships among the members of the school faculty carries high priority.[10]

The teachers involved must play a major part in program development. When curriculum decisions are relegated to or usurped by distant agencies in the district or by specialists unfamiliar with the particular situation in the department, the teachers' commitment to the program will be at best perfunctory.

A great variety of organizational arrangements may be used to encourage cooperative interaction among teachers within a department and to develop and revise the curriculum. The possible informal arrangements are as varied as social situations themselves, from theater parties or book discussion groups to casual department meetings at the

[10] Mark Chesler and Robert Fox, "Teacher Peer Relations and Educational Change," *NEA Journal,* LVI (May 1967), 25–26.

chairman's home. The most obvious formal means to encourage communications and stimulate concern for curriculum revision are department meetings, which should be scheduled for more convenient times than the usual hurried hour after school. If administrative notices can be restricted to dittoed announcements so that meeting time is freed from housekeeping details, the meetings can be devoted to major concerns. Guest speakers, panels, kinescopes from the Commission on English,[11] demonstration lessons, and discussions of promising practices or some aspect of the English program might all add life to department meetings and stimulate the kind of interest and involvement necessary for meaningful curriculum development.

Scheduling groups of English teachers for the same planning period and providing comfortable and convenient meeting places may also encourage interaction and communication. Paid summer workshops and released time for curriculum committees are often possible in larger districts. New teachers especially should be encouraged to voice their ideas, suggest improvements, and raise questions; clear lines of communication must be kept open for all teachers, especially in large departments where continuous informal contact is impossible. Urging teachers to visit each other's classes on some regular basis might also prove profitable in spurring communication and broadening the concerns of individual teachers.

Committees appear to be the favored organizational arrangement for curriculum development and revision. Effective use of committees is illustrated by Clarence Hach's English curriculum committee at Evanston (Illinois) Township High School. The committee consists of four English teachers from different grade levels, appointed by the chairman to serve for two-year terms. Two new members are appointed each year to provide a continuity of membership. Committee members are scheduled together for one period of released time during the school day, when they meet with the chairman to consider and work on curriculum revisions, department needs, and recommendations and problems brought to their attention by other teachers. Committee members also chair grade-level meetings, work to encourage teachers' involvement in the total program, and provide a valuable sounding board for ideas. The committee serves as a source of continuing vitality for the Evanston English program, a means of constant program evaluation and revision,

[11] Information on ordering these free kinescopes is included in Appendix C of the Commission on English's *Freedom and Discipline in English* (New York: CEEB, 1965), pp. 162–165. Scripts for the various kinescopes are available from NCTE and might prove helpful in planning programs for meetings based on the films.

and an important communication link in a department of forty English teachers.[12]

Although such a formal arrangement might be unnecessary or impractical for smaller departments with limited resources, the principles underlying the Evanston English curriculum committee's effectiveness are important to note. First, the committee's existence recognizes the organizational need for a means of constant curriculum evaluation and revision. Second, the committee is given direction by the chairman and—through released time—support by the administration. And third, the committee's work has a definite impact on the program and the department.

Whether the committee is a standing committee on curriculum, K-12 articulation, or textbook selection; a long-range committee to develop language units or some specific area revision; or a special-project committee to deal with an immediate and limited concern, the following points should be considered: (1) Committees should only be formed when there is a real need for them; teachers should never be asked to devote their time to meaningless or poorly planned projects which will not be used, and committees should not be used as a means to table and forget real problems; (2) Committee members should be given the time, support, and direction necessary to do their job; otherwise, either the committee will be ineffective, or the teachers will be exploited; (3) Committee work should be rewarded; for short-term projects requiring little time, professional recognition may be sufficient; for committee work requiring extensive effort and involvement, released time or salary increases should be considered.

Organization and the Teachers

Department organization has a direct relationship to staffing and the supervision of English teachers. This is of particular concern to the new teacher for whom adequate first-year supervision can be an important extension of preservice training. But staffing and supervision, as they affect hiring, retention, scheduling, and evaluation of department members, are of vital concern to every English teacher and to the English program. Too often the responsibility for these functions, either by administrative design or department default, is relegated to agencies outside the department. If responsibility for the quality of the English program resides, as it ultimately must, within the school and the depart-

[12] Clarence Hach, discussions with Experienced Teacher Fellows at the University of Illinois, April 1967.

ment, then responsibility for staffing and supervision should not be removed completely from their influence.

To control the cost of recruiting, to encourage more equitable distribution of teaching talent, and to do the job many individual schools have done poorly, hiring in most districts has become increasingly centralized. There are, however, imperative reasons why principals and department chairmen must be included in the process of teacher selection and assignment. Observers for the Squire-Applebee study noted that in some areas strong principals and chairmen were able to circumvent the central hiring system but that, where they could not, the effect on departments and schools was invariably bad. "A study of these schools has convinced the project staff that the involvement of the principal and especially the department chairman in the final selection of teachers is essential to the establishment of a superior English department." [13] Here again we see the importance of a capable chairman who has the authority and time to do his job. Teachers should question seriously the hiring practices of any district in which the principal and department chairman are excluded from teacher-selection procedures.

Through supervision and its effect on teaching conditions, departments may attract, train, and retain creative teachers whose presence is essential to spark exciting teaching and thinking throughout the department. Work with student teachers from local colleges and cooperation with college departments of education may provide schools with an excellent source of new teachers. Many departments make use of a "big brother" system, pairing a new teacher and an experienced teacher with similar assignments, scheduling them in adjoining rooms, and encouraging visitations to each other's classes. Supplemented by regular conferences with the chairman, other new teachers, and experienced staff, such programs provide the new teacher with the equivalent of an inservice methods course during his first year. The school which provides new teachers with supervision and assistance will find itself better able to retain them and will, of course, be assured of a more competent staff. Too many departments confuse "academic freedom" with lack of supervision or equate supervision with teacher evaluation, neglecting its function for teacher improvement. Surely the beginning teacher must be free to make mistakes; the department whose overzealous supervision stifles the beginner's creativity and enthusiasm or attempts to push him into some mold may do more harm than a department offering no help at all. But there are many unnecessary problems which can be avoided, and much real help can and should be given to new teachers.

[13] Squire and Applebee, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Through the department, all teachers should be encouraged to improve and to keep abreast of developments in the field. Although most schools give lip service to this in hiring brochures and in written policy, far too few actually provide adequate inservice training opportunities. Departments eager to promote continued training of their teachers will usually find policy statements already available to justify their requests. Some departments, in conjunction with departments in neighboring districts or in cooperation with nearby colleges and universities, offer extensive inservice programs geared to the needs and desires of the teachers. Close cooperation with college teacher-training programs may result in a college's willingness to offer courses especially geared to the needs of particular departments. Encouragement and help may be provided to apply for summer institutes or workshops which improve the career teacher's value to his district and increase the likelihood of retaining him in the school.

The effective use of a department's teachers raises the problem of teacher assignments. Certainly not all teachers are equally qualified to teach every class; recognition of their strengths should be reflected in their assignments. There are, nevertheless, several important problems in this aspect of the department's personnel structure. First, although assignment by abilities and preferences may capitalize on teacher resources, it may also restrict their improvement, eventually narrowing rather than broadening the capabilities of the teachers. Second, it may result in the unfortunate practice of assigning to slower or disadvantaged students only those new teachers on the staff who lack the influence to demand the classes they want. Third, it may result in the assignment of artificial status to certain classes or schedules, creating sinecures for a few teachers and perhaps operating to the detriment of the department as a whole.

In some departments, the lack of adequate attention to average and slower students results from the shortsighted and narrow leadership of a chairman who has shaped his viewpoint through continuous teaching of only the brighter students. Many schools and chairmen have avoided these problems by the judicious rotation of teachers to varying assignments, broadening capabilities by careful supervision.

The continuing concerns of the department are reflected in the positions, procedures, and committees it creates. If, for example, a department wishes to assume responsibility for grouping students, policies and procedures must be established. Articulation with other schools involves provision for visitation and the appointment of joint committees. The effective use of lay readers or teacher aides necessitates planning and

adequate procedures. Interdepartmental concerns may lead to shared responsibility for certain courses or special programs.

The most common administrative position is the department chairmanship, but, especially in larger schools, several additional positions may be justified. Besides providing for efficient department operation, such positions provide incentives for and recognition of leadership and may encourage better teachers to remain in the school. Where teachers are organized into teams, team leaders are usually part of the department's administration and are compensated for their extra work. The master teachers in schools which have large numbers of student teachers are often part of the department's authority structure and may be assigned to supervise new teachers as well as interns. In other schools, grade level coordinators may serve as assistant department chairmen and serve with the chairman as a coordinating committee for the department. Perhaps assistant chairmen might be appointed along other lines which reflect the organization of the program: chairmen for language, literature, and composition, for instance, or for honors, average, and slow classes. The most efficient administrative structure will be that which reflects the actual concerns and groupings of teachers within the department.

Although departments must be alert to the dangers of overorganization and of proliferating meaningless titles, in larger departments positions of authority are essential for the operation of the department. As with the chairmanship, positions are only as effective as the people who hold them, and the people who are responsible for a job should be given the time and support necessary to do it.

CONCLUSION

Department organization in itself solves few problems; it merely facilitates the solving of problems. The best organizational arrangement for any English department is that which most effectively and expediently does for the school and its students what the master English teacher does for his classes. Whether the organization is formal or informal matters far less than that the department meets its responsibilities to the students, teachers, subject matter, and school.

Effective and efficient organization is never a matter of chance, however. Conscious concern and constant self-evaluation will be necessary to insure that the department's functions are being carried out and that the arrangements intended to facilitate do not in fact complicate our attempts to improve the English program and our teaching.

We must remember that established patterns of organization are at best temporary arrangements for the solution of yesterday's problems.

Humanities divisions, for instance, are proposed as an organizational answer to the problems of fragmentation and the specious division of subject matter. Although this particular solution seems questionable because of its inefficiency, the problem is not resolved merely by choosing departments as a more effective system. A guide to effective organization of committees does not tell us what committees are necessary to prepare a department for flexible scheduling.

The most serious question about the purpose and organization of English departments in the next decade will probably result from the increasing centralization of administrative functions in multiple-school districts. Those departments which have not been able to function effectively, and even many which have, find themselves increasingly isolated from many of the decisions and actions which have a vital effect on themselves and their students. In some schools the result is a resigned adherence to a stable and consistent, if inappropriate and unimaginative, program. In other schools the result is curriculum chaos, where distant supervision becomes absence of supervision, and in still other schools there is determined maneuvering to circumvent the system. The English specialists, curriculum coordinators, and administrative and instructional services available in large districts can prove extremely valuable to the English departments within the district. Central offices must also attempt to deal with the problems of unequal quality of programs from school to school and the unequal distribution of personnel resources within the system. But the basic functions and responsibilities of departments cannot be performed outside the school. The answers must still be given and interpreted in the context of the particular problems, in the departments where the teachers, students, and program come together.